

Science on Trial

Etiquette and the Impression of Skepticism:

An Examination of

"The Power of Belief"

For December, the NCAS meeting will be a discussion of the issues raised by different approaches to spreading the skeptical viewpoint. Portions of a recent ABC TV news special "The Power of Belief" will be shown to illustrate differing approaches of skeptics and to stimulate discussion of the merits and drawbacks of these approaches.

The TV program was presented by ABC's John Stossel and features skeptic "superstar" James Randi, Skeptic magazine publisher Michael Shermer, a 9 year-old touch therapy investigator Emily Rosa, and others. The forum will challenge your ideas of skeptical "etiquette" and discuss the perceived values and goals of the skeptic movement.

Saturday, December 19, 1998, 2:00pm -- 3:30pm
Montgomery County Library - Bethesda Branch
7400 Arlington Road
Bethesda, Maryland

Everyone Welcome -- Members and Non-members -- No admission charge

Call the NCAS Skeptic Line at 301-587-3827 for further info.

CAPITAL SCIENCE LECTURE

On Tuesday, December 15th, Andrew H. Knoll from the Department of Organisms and Evolutionary Biology, Harvard University will speak on the "Early evolution of animals" in the CAPITAL SCIENCE LECTURES, Carnegie Institution, 1530 P Street N.W., Washington, DC 20077. A remarkable proliferation of animal life occurred some 540 million years ago. For the first time, paleontology, geochemistry, and molecular biology, together with highly accurate dating techniques, are bringing the pattern and time scale of animal diversification into clear focus. All lectures are free and open to the public. Seating is limited. Call (202) 328-6988 or email Sherrill Berger at sberger@pst.ciw.edu for details on attending.

CAVEAT EMPTY: CODFISH WILL THRIVE IN THIS NATURAL PRODUCT

Last week, USA Today, the most widely circulated newspaper in the world, carried a full page ad for "Vitamin O." Every word of the ad is literally true. "It's so safe, you can drop it in your eyes. It's so natural, it contains the most abundant element on earth...without the proper amount of oxygen our bodies can suffer serious health consequences." Next to a picture of an astronaut floating in a space suit, the ad explains that it was designed for use by astronauts. "Vitamin O contains stabilized oxygen molecules in a liquid solution of sodium chloride and distilled water to be taken orally as a supplement, usually 15-20 drops two to three times a day. Your bloodstream absorbs the Vitamin O and carries the pure oxygen straight to your cells and tissues. There, it maximizes your nutrients, purifies your bloodstream and eliminates toxins and poisons." It must be admitted that the supplier, Rose Creek Health Products, seems to have correctly gauged the scientific literacy of the American public. They tell people exactly what it is they're buying -- ordinary salt water. You can buy a two month supply (4-ounces) for \$40 plus shipping charges. The 1994 Dietary Supplement and Health Education Act, exempts natural substances from FDA regulation. [From the November 30 edition of Bob Park's "What's New".]

Critical Thinking or Wishful Thinking

On Friday, January 8th at 10:30am, James Randi, skeptic "superstar" and president of the James Randi Educational Foundation, will give a colloquium at the National Institute of Standards and Technology in Gaithersburg, Maryland (Red auditorium in the main administration building). "We are assailed by an endless stream of pseudoscientific products and services, from laundry balls that replace detergent, to 'magnetic wave insoles' that increase blood flow in our extremities. There is in the media an attitude of science-bashing resulting largely from two facts: the media are primarily trained in the humanities and not the sciences; and it is 'politically correct' to accept everything we are offered as being true. Critical thinking is just not 'in.' Federal agencies can exhibit incredible inertia when called upon to protect the American public from the scam-artists who flourish in such an atmosphere, leaving us virtually helpless in the face of quackery and technology gone mad. We are entering, willy-nilly, a Second Dark Age. And I don't see anything brighter in the Third Millennium." [This talk is free and open to the public.]

NCAS NEEDS YOU!

... or at least two or three of you. The NCAS Board has decided to start a publicity and membership activity to help make others in the region aware of NCAS' existence and of our monthly meetings. If you would like to help out, send email to ncas@ncas.org, call the NCAS line at 301-587-3827 or send a letter to our above address. The important thing is to want to help us.

Science Meets Alternative Medicine

From 7pm Friday, February 26, 1999 until 5pm Sunday, February 28, CSICOP is sponsoring a conference on alternative medicine at the Warwick Hotel in Philadelphia. Sessions on Science and alternative medicine, Psychology of belief, Scientific critiques of alternative medicine, and legal and ethical issues will be presented. Dr. Marcia Angell will give the keynote address. Costs are \$250 per person, \$125 per student. For further information contact Barry Karr at CSICOP at 716-636-1425 or skeptinq@aol.com.

Last Change: December 5, 1998